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ABSTRACT

In order to meet increasing demands for quality child care, a graduate degree program was designed to develop leadership, management, supervision, and evaluation skills for persons in or aspiring to attain positions in child care administration. Based on a weekend college concept, coursework was scheduled on five Saturdays, course assignments were related to programs directed by participants, and emphasis was given to business and computers. Persons eligible to enter the program had to (1) meet all university admission requirements; (2) have an undergraduate degree from an accredited college or university; and (3) be a director, assistant director, head teacher, or education coordinator in a child care facility or aspire to such position. Courses offered in the 36-hour Master's Degree program were generally those approved in the Master's Degree program in early childhood education. A questionnaire was sent to all 27 program participants to obtain an indication of the relative success of the program and directions for program development. It was concluded that a graduate degree program designed for working child care directors can be successfully established. (Findings of the evaluation effort are reported, and the instrument is appended.) (RH)

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IMPROVING THE EDUCATION OF VERY YOUNG CHILDREN AND BOOSTING UNIVERSITY ENROLLMENT THROUGH A MASTERS DEGREE PROGRAM IN CHILD CARE ADMINISTRATION

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IMPROVING THE EDUCATION OF VERY YOUNG CHILDREN AND BOOSTING UNIVERSITY ENROLLMENT THROUGH A MASTERS DEGREE PROGRAM IN CHILD CARE ADMINISTRATION*

Hofferth 1979) has predicted that seven years from now there will be 23.2 million children under six in our country. Of these ,nearly 45% will have working mothers in need of some type of child care facility (Hofferth, Moore, and Caldwell, 1978 ; Moore and Hofferth, 1979). Recent research has indicated that QUALITY child care is essential for future academic and social success. Specifically, research to date strongly supports the following results of quality child care :

1. Children are better able to adjust to primary grades.
2. They exhibit increased intellectual functioning during later schooling.
3. Children in quality programs rate themselves more competent in school (Lazar, Hubbell, Murray, Rosche, and Royce, 1977) .
4. They are less likely to be assigned to special education programs (Foster and Weikart,1978, Darlington and Lazar,1977, and Weikart and Schweinhart, 1980) .
5. They experience no signifiant disruption in attachment to their mothers (Belsky and Steinberg,1978) .

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* A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Teacher Educators, Orlando, Florida, February, 1983.

6. They are more likely to be achievement-oriented (Darlington and Lazar, 1977).
7. They demonstrate more appropriate classroom behavior through high school and are rated by teachers as being more highly motivated (Weikart and Schweinhart, 1980).
8. They demonstrate better nutritional and health status (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1980.

In light of the above evidence, the case can be made for the need for quality child care services. Quality programs, however, require quality personnel. Yet, qualifications for persons working in child care facilities are generally poor at best. In states where minimum requirements exist, for example, teachers of preschool children are seldom required to be more than "18 years of age and able to read and write." To be director of a child care facility generally requires a high school diploma, some coursework in child development or some related field (usually 6 semester hours), and some type of child-related experience. At the same time prospects for raising standards for child care personnel are dismal in light of current budget cuts , the need for more highly trained people has never been greater.

In order to meet the increasing demands for quality child care, a graduate degree program was developed at North Texas State University in Denton , Texas . The program which began in the fall of 1981 was specifically designed to develop leadership, management, supervision, and evaluation skills for those person who held administrative positions or who aspired to a career in child care administration.

Special Features of the Program

In order to succeed, any program designed for working administrators must take into account realities of a given job. In child care, directors typically work from 7:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. . Since university coursework is traditionally scheduled from 5:30-8:30 in the evenings for graduate students and because of the long hours associated with child care, a number of alterations in scheduling were necessary.

The coursework for this special program was offered on five Saturdays scheduled throughout the semester. Students arrived at 8:30 a.m. and concluded class at 5:30 p.m. . This weekend college concept was especially appealing to administrators commuting to campus from Dallas and Ft. Worth which are about 35 miles from the training cite. To save money for fuel, administrators quickly developed car pooles. In addition to saving money, participants engaged in professional and personal discussions while traveling to and from weekend classes. This contact was especially instrumental in developing close friendships among administrators. This later element may have the most long-lasting and significant impact upon our graduates since at the beginning of the program participants admitted feeling alone and helpless in a high-stress position.

An equally attractive element of this program is that ,where possible and educationally sound, course assignments were related to programs actually directed by participants. In the introductory course (Advanced Studies in Early Childhood Education), for example, the major assignment was to evaluate

respective centers using analytical frameworks developed in class. Completed evaluations were not only useful to participating directors and staff in making reasonable classroom changes ,but were also well-received by members of Boards of Directors.

In addition to curricular sorts of courses traditionally taken by Early Childhood personnel, the CCA (Child Care Administration) program offers special emphasis in business and computers. Realizing that child care is a BUSINESS, an entire course was offered to develop skill in management and operation of a small business. Only two of the initial participants had any formal preparation in business.

Computers are rapidly inundating the lives of increasingly younger children. Many child care centers attempt to profit from the computer bandwagon and advertise "computer tutor curriculum" in their adds (Note: "computer tutor" is generally listed above other qualifications such as "certified teachers" and "professional affiliations.") Articles such as "Computers Preparing Preschoolers for Kindergarten" and "Learning by Computers at Age 4" are now commonplace. Yet, from a research standpoint, very little is known about the appropriateness of computers for very young children. Therefore, in an attempt to better prepare Child Care Administrators, a major portion of Advanced Studies in Early Childhood Education was devoted to development of basic computer literacy skills, as well as to develop discussion concerning the developmental appropriateness of computers.

In addition to curricular concerns, a number of computer management programs designed specifically for child care centers have recently appeared on the market. These programs ,designed to decrease paper-work and provide administrators with more curriculum development and supervisory time will be explored with future participants.

Eligibility

To be eligible for this program, participants had to (1) meet all university admission requirements (2) have an undergraduate degree from an accredited college or university, and (3) be a director, assistant director, head teacher, or education coordinator in a child care facility or aspire to such positions.

Coursework

Courses offered in this 36 hour Master's Degree program were in general, courses which had been approved in the regular Masters degree program in Early Childhood Education. Since only child care administrators were assigned to the CCA classes, however, actual content of the courses was able to be adapted to the specific needs and concerns of practicing administrators. Courses included the following:

EDEE 571 Admissions Seminar

EDEC 507 Advanced Studies in Early Childhood Education

EDEC 557 The Role of Related Agencies Serving Young Children

EDEC 558 Teaching Young Children of Diverse Cultures

EDEC 559 Professional Laboratory Experiences in Early Childhood Education

EDUC 501 Human Development and Learning

EDEC 580 Human Relations in the Child Care Context

HOEC 513 Current Problems in Administration and Organization of Nursery School and Day Care Programs

HOEC 533 Patterns in Parent-Child Interaction

BUSI 580 Small Business Analysis and Administration

EDEE 572 Evaluation Seminar

Elective

Of the above suggested course sequence, 3 courses (EDEE 571,572 and EDUC 501) were required of all Master degree candidates in the Division of Elementary , Early Childhood, Reading,and Special Education at North Texas State University. Since it was felt a strong background in child development was essential for administrators of programs for children ,2 courses (HOEC 513 and 533)were required from the School of Home Economics where Child Development courses are traditionally taught. A course in Business Administration (Busi 580) was also required. With the exception of EDEC 581 ,Human Relations in the Child Care Context , which was specifically developed for this program, all other courses in (EDEC 507,557,558 and 559) were required courses in the regular Masters Degree Program in Early Childhood Education.

Courses were sequenced so that administrators were able to take at least one Saturday course each semester until completion of the program. Course dates were arranged so that those who

wished to complete the program more quickly were able to take 2 classes (10 Saturdays) during the regular semester.

Recruitment

In order to determine interest in such a program, in the Summer of 1981 a flyer describing the program was sent to a random sample of 50 administrators from a pool of about 4,000. (Listings of licenced child care centers can be obtained at no charge from the local Dept. of Human Resources, Welfare Department, or state agency in charge of child care.) Of the initial 50 flyers, 39 administrators responded they were "definately" interested in such a program. Of the 39 initial respondents, only 25 met eligibility requirements. Fall, 1981, 11 administrators enrolled in Cycle I of our program.

In the Spring of 1982 program information was sent to 915 administrators. Of 105 responding , 46 were eligible. Sixteen enrolled in Cycle II of the program in the Fall of 1982.

This year as we prepare for Cycle III Administrators we are planning to expand recruitment efforts to include articles in newsletters of the local chapters of professional organizations in the field of Early Childhood Education.

Program Evaluation

To date, 27 graduate students are enrolled in our graduate program for Child Care Administrators. In order to obtain an indication of the relative success of the program and to obtain directions for expanded efforts, a questionnaire (see Appendix A) was sent to all program participants. Fourteen anonymous

responses were returned.

A number of items were especially noteworthy. First of all, in response to item 1 to determine if a program designed with practical concerns of acting administrators in mind was worth the effort, 86% of the respondents indicated they "would not" or "probably would not" have enrolled in graduate school if it were not for this program. This response might indicate that increasing numbers of child care personnel may be interested in working toward an advanced degree.

Secondly, 93% of the respondents indicated they would not have enrolled in this program if it was not offered on weekends. This finding may indicate that universities need to be more flexible in their scheduling course offerings to facilitate the needs of students engaged in full-time employment.

Responses to Question 3, concerning "advantages of the program" provided a great deal of information concerning possible reasons for the program's popularity. Ninety-three percent of respondents expressed the view that working together in long blocks of time over the weekend assisted in the development of "close relationships with other directors."

All respondents indicated the program framework enabled them to gain a great deal from interacting with other practicing directors. The specific nature of perceived meaningful interactions included : sharing pesonal professional concerns, sharing ideas that work well in other centers, information on salaries at other centers, ideas for better handling of parent and staff problems, hints on recruiting better personnel, and

gaining insights into the day-to-day operations of other centers in the area.

Seventy-one percent of respondents indicated the program provided an opportunity to imporve administrative skills. Sixty-four percent indicated a major advantage was giving participants a chance "to get a degree while maintaining their respective positions." Ninety-three percent indicated the program assisted them in becoming more knowledgeable of developing ideas concerning the education of young children. Finally, 100% felt a major asset of the program was "the practical nature of assignments."

Eighty-five percent of those responding indicated that they shared "at least 50% of what they learned with their staff." Since teachers in child care often lack formal academic preparation, this finding was especially important. Our CCA program appears to be a useful vehicle for providing badly needed inservice education for child care programs. In informal discussions, a number of participants further indicated sharing useful information with staff members built confidence in administrator's instructional leadership abilities.

It was also interesting to note that employers appear to value the advanced education of their directors. Thirty percent of the employers are paying for either all or part of participant's tuition. At a time when financial aid is becoming more difficult for students to obtain, the willingness of directors to support advanced training is encouraging.

Seventy-nine percent of respondents indicated they intend to continue as Child Care Administrators after completing the

program. This is a bit unusual since forces such as low pay, long hours, job stress and other factors contribute to a very high turnover rate in the child care profession. Yet, if a program such as this results in retention of highly qualified professionals, the venture is certainly worth the effort.

Respondents also indicated a number of advantages of the Saturday class format over the traditional one-night-per-week framework. Perceived advantages included : saving gasoline, less child care problems since most spouses did not work on Saturday, less interference with late working schedules of directors, saving driving time (participants traveled 45 minutes to class), longer class hours allowed participants to "get into more serious discussions," participants were more rested on Saturday and more able to better concentrate, and the Saturday format enabled working parents to spend less time away from their children.

Finally, all respondents felt the professional courses described in their degree plans appeared relevant to their current positions.

Conclusions

Although the need for highly educated child care personnel to direct increasing numbers of facilities has never been greater, few universities view child care administrators as a potential student market. This program has aptly demonstrated that with little recruitement effort, a graduate degree program designed for working child care directors can be successfully

established. Active recruitement of child care administrators into quality university programs offers a great deal of potential for expanding university enrollment as well as improving the educational lives of very young children.

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APPENDIX A

PROGRAM PROGRESS EVALUATION

SUMMARY

PROGRAM EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

NCSU CHILD CARE ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM

(And Response Summary)

DIRECTIONS: Please read carefully and check all that apply. DO NOT include your name. Return the completed questionnaire in the enclosed envelope. Thank you.

1. If it were not for this program,

____ I WOULD NOT have taken further university graduate study.

____ I WOULD PROBABLY NOT have taken further university graduate study.

____ I WOULD PROBABLY have taken further university graduate study at another time.

____ I WOULD HAVE taken further university graduate study.

2. I would_____ I would not _____ have enrolled if the courses were not offered on Saturdays.

3. What do you feel are the major advantages of this program? Check all that apply and please add any not included.

____ Development of close relationships with other practicing directors.

____ A chance to interact with other administrators. (If you check this, please describe how specifically this interaction helped you. E.G., others told me how to save money, hints on interviewing and dealing with staff.

(RESPONSES)

Sharing personal concerns, sharing ideas that work well in different centers, information on salary, handling of parent and staff problems, hints on personnel, communicating with parents and classroom difficulties,sharing of different solutions for similar problems, gaining insights into various programs in the area,new research in this feild.

____ A chance to improve my administrative skills.

____ A chance to get a degree while maintaining my position.

____ To become knowledgeable of developing ideas concerning the

education of young children.

____ The practical nature of course assignments.

____ Other (Use back side of the page)

4. Please estimate the percent of content and ideas discussed in class sessions you have shared with your teachers in either formal or informal setting. (circle one)

	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Response:			1	1	2	3	1	2	3	

5. Did the governing board/owners of your center in any way help pay for the cost of your courses?

Yes 4 No 9

If yes, please explain.

Responses:

Board had planned to pay 50%, but ended up paying 80% for 1st semester.
Paid for tuition.
Board will pay 1/3 after the fact, she paid 50% of tuition.
Reimbursed tuition through grant program.

6. Do you plan on continuing as a child care administrator after completing your degree?

Yes 11 No 1 Undecided 1

7. What are some advantages of the Saturday classes over the traditional one night/week for 15 weeks scheduling system?

Responses:

Save gasoline, no babysitting problems, doesn't interfere with late working schedule, doesn't waste a lot of time driving, plenty of time to share ideas and get into serious discussions, working all day, all week leaves little time in the evenings, more rested on Saturday and able to concentrate better, easier for working parents-less time away from children.

8. What are some suggestions you have for improving this program? How could it be more supportive of your needs and concerns?

Responses:

Closer campus-Arlington area, time to sit down and discuss degree plan and options for classes, more communication as to what is expected and planned for future, interested in knowing needs of day care as a business.

9. Do the professional courses described in your degree program appear relevant to your current position?

Yes 13 No 0

10. What other types of courses would be useful?

Responses:

business, workshops-sharing of ideas, additional psychology, couseling, developing effective budgets, handling of handicapped children, personnel management, hiring techniques, feedback sessions later, computer literacy, learning problems, motivation of people.